

Book Review

Margaret A. Post, Elaine Ward, Nicholas V. Longo & John A. Saltmarsh (2016). *Publicly engaged scholars: Next generation engagement and the future of higher education*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

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It is a new day in academia, and *Publicly Engaged Scholars: Next Generation Engagement and the Future of Higher Education* is here to tell the story. An outgrowth of the New Generation Engagement Project, a working group organized under the New England Resource Center for Higher Education, the book presents a diverse cadre of individuals who are upsetting the proverbial applecart (a.k.a. the academy) and transforming – as Nadinne Cruz notes on the back cover – long-held conceptions of what we call “the work.”

Timothy K. Eatman, Imagining America’s faculty co-director, kicks off the volume and sets the tone with a personal anecdote that underscores the need for each of us to understand our scholarly identities and the larger purposes of our work. Following Eatman’s forward, the preface introduces an editorial team comprised of heavy-hitters from the civic engagement world. In these prefatory pieces, the editors manage to forge a sense of community and press for institutional change by creating a forum for intentional and oftentimes blunt – but necessary – conversations about the role of the academy in public life.

Next generation scholars, a moniker that describes most of the contributors, are central to these discussions. But who are they? According to the editors, they are, in part, individuals whose voices “are all too often silenced or suppressed within the dominant culture of academia” (p. xx). So the editors intentionally adopt a narrative approach to share the stories of those who regard community engagement as more than an afterthought or something scholars do post-tenure. The decision to highlight these voices translates into a collection of personal yet provocative essays co-authored by writing teams that blur disciplinary and even professional boundaries. But *Publicly Engaged Scholars* is more than a tripartite tale of engaging (no pun intended) coffee-table-worthy-reads. At its core, the book tells a “larger, collective story about the power and possibility of democratic change in higher education” (p. xx).

The introduction gives us a sense of what is at stake as the editors highlight some of the stark realities of our current academic landscape – one that suffers from merciless budget cuts, the death of the tenure system as we know it, as well as a growing transactional approach to learning, to name a few. Lest we feel defeated by the litany of challenges facing higher education and begin to question why we are here to begin with, the editors offer a ray of light, positioning the work of next generation scholars as “disruptive democratic innovation,” a much needed intervention that can revitalize the democratic purposes of higher education (p. 1) and potentially change our democracy for the better.

In the opening chapter, the editors argue that this next generation – which includes engaged scholars, practitioners, and scholar-activists – “is committed to the public purposes of higher education, but not committed to perpetuating the existing policies, structures, and practices that have delegitimized their epistemological and ontological position...” (p. 2). The book argues, “At its core, next-generation engagement is defined by a collaborative engagement paradigm of teaching, learning, and scholarship in which faculty, students, and community partners co-create knowledge and learning” (pp. 4-5). Next generation scholars are embedded in the life of the university and the community, and their work is intimately connected to and stems from community concerns. This connection is the hallmark of next generation scholars, and as the editors suggest, their growing numbers require us all to recognize new ways of doing business.

In chapter two (the first full chapter), service-learning forerunner John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley demonstrate why this generation is deemed “next.” Their analysis highlights social, political, and academic trends that have led us to the present juncture: ranging from the influence of Cold War politics on university research agendas, to an emphasis on student-centered teaching, to the impact of multiculturalism in the academy and the rise of neoliberalism. Most usefully, they identify an “emergent public engagement knowledge/learning regime” in which knowledge

production necessarily involves community participation (pp. 28-29). The two follow with a companion chapter that gives readers a cursory but critical look at 30 years in the academy's history of civic engagement. They travel back to the 1980s and to key moments such as the formation of Campus Compact and the emergence and institutionalization of service-learning.

The remaining essays in part one focus on teaching, research, and academic legitimacy. Chapter four explores collaborative engagement as an innovative teaching mode that recognizes "learners as *co-creators* of knowledge through *democratic education*, and the involvement of a diverse range of participants in *deliberative* conversations to address real world problems" (p. 61). For those who may be confused about the boundaries of pedagogical practices, the authors include tables that clearly compare more traditional instructional modes and a collaborative engagement model.

Collaboration continues to be the key in chapter five which considers research practices rooted in collaborative engagement. The authors give a nod to community-based participatory research for "breaking down the dichotomies of traditional and community-engaged research practices and more fully acknowledging that cooperation between the two leads to a holistic research practice grounded in democratic and deliberative values" (p. 77). For the authors, a collaborative orientation, built on shared decision-making, results in necessary social change as opposed to research and knowledge "with no immediate intended actionable impact" (p. 78). The chapter includes a table that spells out the differences between traditional and collaborative engagement research, particularly noting the power dynamics embedded in both research models.

Chapter six focuses on institutional barriers and addresses how the quest for academic legitimacy can dissuade community-minded scholars from active engagement. O'Meara traces the divergent paths of two scholars to illustrate how "engaged scholars are [often] disadvantaged and traditional scholars advantaged by organization practices that convey legitimacy in higher education institutions" (p. 100). This is a sobering chapter for anyone seeking to undertake engaged scholarship. Yet, the chapter ends with a checklist of practical interventions that embody the spirit of disruptive innovation identified early on by the editors.

With part two, we meet the leaders of the new school (to borrow from a 90s hip hop group). This section steers readers in a slightly different direction by turning to the narratives of more than 20 engaged scholars who discuss their

experiences in challenging the entrenched dichotomies of the academy. In chapter seven, Emily Janke reflects on her work as a "boundary spanner" (p. 119), and Annie Miller, a doctoral student and adjunct faculty member, shares her struggle to find community within academia. Lina Dostilio, a former first-generation college student and now director of a university community engagement center, questions how engagement often gets reduced to "a set of teaching methods or activities as means to check off the community engagement box before moving onto other matters" (p. 125). Ouch! But as Andrew Seligsohn notes on the back cover, *Public Engaged Scholars* is "unflinching." And as Dostilio's commentary demonstrates, the book unapologetically pushes us to take a closer look at ourselves as scholars and as change agents within our own institutions.

Chapter eight features a team of five writers, ranging from a recent college grad and Bonner Scholar to a doctoral candidate who urges scholars to resist the "pressure to fracture [our] personal identities" which often give rise to our engagement commitments (p. 138). We also hear concerns from a university administrator who "question[s] if the engagement terminology is applied by the academy to make what should be a disruptive innovation, a safe intervention" (p. 139). Chapters nine through 12 include stories that reflect the multiple roads to engaged scholarship and the unique challenges and opportunities for those occupying alt-ac positions. The authors critique the "higher ed-centric approach to knowledge creation" while "advocat[ing] a position that acknowledges [the] multiple centers of knowledge" (p. 157) that reside in communities and in our students.

Part three rounds out the collection by tackling "The Future of Engagement" (p. 195). Chapter 13 focuses on students as knowledge producers and pivotal figures not only in furthering campus civic engagement efforts but also in *defining* the civic engagement movement. Chapter 14 warns against neoliberalism as an ideology that privileges the economic purposes of higher education, and the authors call for realistic changes in graduate education as a means to resist "neoliberalism's creep into university life" (p. 227). With the final chapter, Byron P. White offers Cleveland State University's Division of University Engagement as one example of how we might restructure institutions to fully realize the promise of engagement.

Noted engagement scholar Peter Levine closes the book with a semi-autobiographical piece that reveals his own path to engaged scholarship and points to the place of theory in our engagement endeavors. While acknowledging the very real

barriers to engagement, Levine notes that theory is on our side. It can help us conceptualize change. Citing the political theories that developed out of the civil rights movement, he aptly reminds us that social change, activism, and theory are not mutually exclusive.

As an AmeriCorps alum, a former university community partner, and current doctoral candidate, I see myself in all these stories. And, in a time where drastic changes in social, cultural, economic, and political life flood our classrooms and campuses, I often wonder: How do we respond in this moment? How do we act? What is our role? And, on dispiriting days, I ask: Do we even have one? *Publicly Engaged Scholars* assures us that we do.